

Testimony in support of HB 5280 and HB 5837 Cottage Industry Food Bills

Submitted to: Michigan House of Representatives Agriculture Committee

Submitted by: Amanda Maria Edmonds- Executive Director, Growing Hope, and on behalf of the
Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers' Market

Date: May 5, 2010

I'm here to speak in support of all three bills that are before the committee, and to give you the perspective of the impact HB 5280/5837 will have on our communities' health and vitality.

I'm the Executive Director of Growing Hope, an Ypsilanti-based nonprofit organization dedicated to growing, eating, and accessing healthy food. In 2006 we founded the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers' Market, and I'm going to give you a few statistics about our market because they mirror trends at markets across the state, and indicate why supporting these bills is so important. First, I'll share the three reasons—all related—why I urge you to support these bills:

- 1) Supporting these bills supports local entrepreneurs, particularly limited income entrepreneurs
- 2) Supporting local entrepreneurs supports farmers' markets
- 3) Supporting farmers' markets supports food local food access & household food security, supports economic vitality, and supports community development

Growing Hope began the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers Market in 2006 as part of a broader community effort to increase access to healthy food in our area; no major grocery store exists in our city limits so accessing fresh, healthy food is difficult. As elsewhere in our state, economic conditions have made it harder for more families to get by and meet basic food needs in a healthy way. Coupled with the recent data that the current generation of children for the first time in centuries has a shorter life expectancy than we do-- largely because of diet- and exercise-related disease-- access to affordable, healthy food is essential. The impact of our market on our local food & economic environments has been great and is shown through a few statistics-- sales in 2006 among all vendors were \$22,000; in 2009 they had jumped to \$108,000. Of this \$108K, \$21,000 were sales using food stamps, Project Fresh and other low-income assistance programs-- largely federal funds being used in Michigan to support local food, and stimulate the local economy. Last year, there were 15,000 visits to our Tuesday afternoon market, and 50% of customers consistently say they frequent other downtown Ypsilanti businesses or institutions while at the market. The market is indeed stimulating other economic revitalization downtown. Yesterday was a beautiful opening day for our 5th season, with over 700 people-- and for a downtown working hard to come back from difficult times, 700 people present in a four hour period is significant from an economic development standpoint.

Now, this bill isn't about our market or farmers' markets in general, but I can share from my own experience that a Cottage Industry law will have a significant impact on market viability across the state.

To do so, I want to tell you about one of our core vendors-- Maggie. She lives in a low-income, HUD-subsidized senior high-rise directly across the street from the market. When the market started, Maggie as an extremely low-income senior had no car, had no phone, and had very little to get by on. She was struggling. But, one gift she has is baking. Maggie's baked goods are like none you've tasted.

Additionally, here are some of the comments I gathered from colleagues across the state:

According to the Michigan League for Human Services, four out of the six highest-employing jobs in Michigan pay wages that will not lift a family of four out of poverty. The Cottage Food Bill is a creative and unique way for the legislature to show a vote of confidence to industrious, courageous and creative Michigan family businesses without the heavy burden of political, bureaucratic, cost prohibitive licensures and inspections. For the "brick and mortar/ big box" industries to claim that this bill gives small family businesses "unequal competition" is a cry from a wolf in sheep's clothing. Perhaps we as a State should ask the big-box/ brick and mortar businesses to increase the living wages of those they employ and lift the Michiganders that they "support" out of poverty. Until then, Michigan farmers and families should be encouraged and cheered on by the legislators, non-profits and other NGO's to be entrepreneurial survivors of these unique and difficult economic times.

As Michigan attempts to grasp at defining its "new economy" this bill is just one vehicle in which we can lead the way in re-defining ourselves and our economy.

*Toril Fisher
Executive Director Farming For Our Future at Pond Hill
www.farmingforourfuture.org*

I agree completely with your position on the re-proposed Ag Bill. As a Meridian Township Trustee and Farmers Market vendor, I personally witness the struggles of pickle producers in particular who are excluded from the coverage of Cottage Industry exemptions as defined in the proposed language. Please add my admittedly humble weight to your presentation Wednesday. I am also a past Secretary of MIFMA, the Michigan Farmers Market Association, and acquired and reported many concerns on this matter when serving in that capacity, 2008-2009. Yours truly, Lynn J. Ochberg, 517-349-7414, 4383 Maumee, Okemos MI 48864, home of Ochberg Sugar Bush.

I believe this bill will be great for both vendors and consumers. Consumers are looking for home grown, homemade products that will be better for their family but because both spouses work there is not enough time for the extra things that would help make their family healthy. I have looked for a commercial kitchen to rent. I checked with a couple of churches that have licensed kitchens and they wouldn't let me rent it because it was for profit. I checked with two businesses. One was closed on Mon. and Tues so I could have used that. The other one closes at 3:00 in the afternoon so I could have used that evenings. Both were willing to let me rent. The inspector said no to both. Neither one of them had enough storage room to accomadate my things and their own and there just plain wasn't enough room for me to be there too. Most places that have licensed kitchens are busy in them all day and many have bakers or cooks in them at night. I don't know where else to look for a place. It would help my business a lot to be able to use my own kitchen. Thank you. Jeanne Suggate

Even though FSEP does not run a farmers' market, we value this bill. It will allow those who are interested in starting up food-related businesses on a small scale access to a market with minimal costs. Small scale food producers can test the market for their products without investing large sums of money in renting commercial kitchen space to determine if the operation is financially viable. This bill opens up opportunities for those who might not otherwise possess the means to become entrepreneurs.

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licensing so that the small struggling farmer can do Added Value Jams and Jellies without losing the farm to the banker.

Thank you for your time

Lucy Pier

Market Manager

Menominee Historical Downtown Farmer Market

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I'm the organizer for the Pontiac Agriculture Network and for a large community garden - Kimberly Royal Community Garden at Grace and Peace Community Church in Pontiac. One of our most daunting issues and one which largely prevents us from creating value added products to sell from our gardens and hives are the restrictions with regard to commercial kitchens and honey houses. Someday we hope to have these facilities available to us but they are not now and we can't afford to build or lease them.

Judith Hainaut

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